

GENERATIONAL IMPACT ON CHAPEL HILL FIRE DEPARTMENT

Executive Development

The Impacts of Generations X and Y on Teamwork on the
Chapel Hill Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

The research problem and purpose focused on generational differences and impacts of the newest generation of fire service personnel on teamwork. The descriptive research method was used to address these questions:

How does the addition of the newest generation to the workforce impact teamwork in public and private organizations, other emergency services organizations and the Chapel Hill Fire Department?

What are the consequences of impacts on teamwork for Chapel Hill Fire Department and how can we harness the energy and talents of the newest fire service generation while maintaining team integrity?

Procedures included surveys, personal observations and interviews. Results indicated existing teamwork issues but those are not entirely attributable to generational differences.

Recommendations include employee focus groups and diversity training.

Generational Differences in Chapel Hill Fire Department

Introduction

The generational differences at Chapel Hill Fire Department may be a contributing factor towards poor team performance. Generally, the personnel in our department who are 18-25 years of age do not regularly participate in team activities preferring instead to “go it alone.” The research problem is the newest fire service generation (employees 18-25 years of age) in Chapel Hill Fire Department does not participate in fitness training, leisure activities and general station duties as a team. This has a negative impact on teamwork and may result in poor team performance during emergency response. Utilizing the descriptive research method the research purpose is to identify the reasons the newest fire service generation does not participate in fitness training, leisure activities and general station duties as a team so we can then determine methods and strategies to employ to re-focus attitudes and behaviors on the importance of teamwork for routine duties and emergency response. The research questions are as follows:

How does the addition of the newest generation to the workforce impact teamwork in public and private organizations?

How does the addition of the newest fire service generation to the workforce impact teamwork in other emergency services organizations?

How does the addition of the newest fire service generation to the workforce impact teamwork at Chapel Hill Fire Department?

What are the consequences of these negative impacts on teamwork for Chapel Hill Fire Department?

How can Chapel Hill Fire Department harness the energy and individual talents that employees in the newest fire service generation bring to the department while maintaining the integrity of the team concept?

In order to improve teamwork and team skills the command level and line officers of Chapel Hill Fire Department must develop an understanding of the behaviors and values needed to motivate this newest fire service generation. This is critical for the successful continuance of our core mission.

Background and Significance

The Chapel Hill Fire Department consists of 92 personnel functioning in three divisions; Operations, Life Safety and Training/Special Operations. A deputy chief supervises each division and these personnel are directly responsible to the Fire Chief. The department provides emergency response services from five fire stations with four engine companies, one ladder company one squad with extrication equipment and one tactical unit with a compressed air foam system. There are three battalion chiefs who directly supervise the personnel on their respective shifts and have primary responsibility for all operations. The shift personnel work three 24-hour shifts with a day off between each until they complete a three-day rotation. Following the third day on shift they have four days off duty.

In addition to fire suppression, the department provides emergency medical response at the first responder level, hazardous materials response at the operations level and response for special

operations including Urban Search and Rescue. The annual budget last year was \$6,666,957 and the department responded to 4,323 calls for service during the 2006-2007 fiscal year. The Town of Chapel Hill has a population of 51,519 and covers an area of 21.1 square miles.

The Operations Division (Suppression) is the largest with a total of 86 personnel. Twelve of these personnel completed the recruit academy or were otherwise hired in 2006. As the result of a SAFER grant award and normal attrition an additional 17 personnel graduated from the academy in August 2007. The impact for Chapel Hill Fire Department is that one-third of the personnel in the Operations Division has less than one year of operational experience. Of this group, 27 of those personnel are 25 years of age or younger and the generational differences combined with the number of people in the newest fire service generation who are coming to work in our department seems to create a negative impact on teamwork and team skills development.

Prior to 2006 when Chapel Hill Fire Department needed to hire personnel to fill vacancies, we typically advertised for and hired personnel who were already certified by the state of North Carolina as firefighters; these personnel usually had previous experience. Most were also either a cusper of the baby boomer generation or Generation X, but the influences of the baby boomer generation had a substantial impact on their personal development. Therefore when these personnel became employees of Chapel Hill Fire Department, assimilation was relatively smooth and there were few problems in terms of working relationships or teamwork during the transition.

In 2006 the department administration made the decision to recruit personnel with no previous experience and certify them by conducting our own recruit academy. A number of the people in that academy had just completed college and they were also less than 25 years of age. In the year since those personnel completed the academy we have observed that teamwork hasn't been as consistent as it was previously. Older personnel are not accustomed to having to incorporate such a large number of personnel from the newest generation into the cohesive team function, particularly a large group of new personnel at the same time. This is creating confusion and, in some cases, conflict resulting in teamwork issues. As a result of discussion with fire service colleagues in other departments this problem is not specific to Chapel Hill Fire Department and the issue of generational differences seems to be relevant throughout the fire service.

This year the department graduated an academy of 17 new personnel who need to assimilate into the requirements that accompany day-to-day life in the fire station. Except for two, all of the personnel in this group are in the 18-25 age range. Since we have already acknowledged concerns about the breakdown of the team concept and team skills, we anticipate that with the addition of more personnel in the newest fire service generation, the problems will continue and potentially result in further team deterioration unless we undertake needed measures to resolve the issues at hand.

The intent of this paper is to determine what new methods, behaviors and attitudes the personnel of Chapel Hill Fire Department must employ in order to maintain and improve team skills and impress upon all members the importance of continued efforts to develop the team concept. In the face of the generational differences and influx of the newest generation of fire service

personnel everyone has to be willing to put aside the stereotypes that each generation is tagged with so we can get to know the individual as a person. This is the first step to complete so we can re-focus on team development and maintain our organizational effectiveness.

Literature Review

Before we can change attitudes and behaviors that exist between the generations, we must first develop an understanding of the values, events and societal norms that influenced the development and philosophies of each generation. Currently, the workforce is comprised of four generations of workers, according to Lancaster & Stillman (2002, p. 13). The generations are defined as the following: “The Silent Generation (born between 1900 and 1945) also referred to as Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (1965-1980) and Generation Y (1981-1999).” Each of the generations has faced very different kinds of challenges, including societal shifts, which contribute to the gap between them. While Traditionalists did not live through or directly feel the effects of the Great Depression their parents did. As a result they were taught the value of a hard day’s labor and the importance of saving for the unknown. The baby boomer era is by far the longest era and it is defined as the generation that is “optimistic, competitive [and] confident” according to a newsletter from OI Partners.net (“Generational Differences Can Make for a Confusing Workplace,” 2006, ¶ 12). Due to the sheer size of this generation, in numbers, boomers had to learn to allocate resources at a young age because there simply wasn’t enough to go around. Members of the boomer generation also led the charge to the top of the heap, as demonstrated by the number of CEO’s,

CFO's and influential directors at the top of major organizations who were born during this period.

Gen X saw seismic shifts in expectations and the societal environment was changing rapidly.

Divorce became more commonplace as it was no longer considered to be taboo so the number of single parent families increased. Job security and long term commitments by employees in the workforce began to change; no longer did individuals expect to, nor did they want to work for the same company until retirement. Company loyalty simply did not hold the same allure, nor was it guaranteed as corporations focused more on profits (Thielfoldt & Scheef, 8/2004, ¶ 4).

Massive company layoffs, restructuring, and downsizing left large numbers of workers without jobs, retirement benefits, and security beginning in the 1980's and continuing into the 1990's.

Generation X and Y took note and were influenced by these events. In short, employer and employee priorities changed. Cohorts from Generation X do not hesitate to question authority and rather than plan for the unexpected, are more likely to just ride the wave to see where it goes ("Generational Differences Can Make for a Confusing Workplace," 2006, ¶ 13).

Generation Y grew up with the technology that we all take for granted today; computers, the internet and digital communications were commonplace. The societal norms that saw a huge shift during Generation X (more diversity, increased tolerance, the demise of employer/employee loyalty) became the expectation for Generation Y. Technology, the new societal norms and changing employer/employee attitudes regarding expectations in the workforce impacted the formative years of this generation ("Generational Differences Can Make for a Confusing Workplace," 2006, ¶ 14). They grew up to expect this.

In relation to the impacts of the newest generation to the workforce in public and private organizations the article from IEEE-USA's Intergenerational Workforce White Paper (IWWP) states that younger generations "lack the ability to be team players and do not have the work high work ethic," and perspective of former generations (Perkins, Hutchins, Lions, Lindborg, 2007, p. 4). Unfortunately, this perspective/stereotype is widespread and many, especially traditionalists and baby boomers, espouse this attitude toward younger employees. Additionally, for a number of years many organizations have changed philosophies toward their workforces that are motivated by profits rather than employee loyalty. This, coupled with the almost daily changes in technology, means that older workers may feel outdated with tenuous job security while younger workers may be considered more desirable and contemporary (Perkins, et al., 2007, p. 3). If this attitude is prevalent in organizations older workers will fear for their jobs because they will view the younger employees as the ones who are trying to replace them. In an environment ruled by fear, teamwork cannot succeed.

Generational differences also impact organizational priorities including efficiency and output. According to ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership (Sago, 2000, p. 3) in an article titled *Uncommon Threads: Mending the Generation Gap at Work*, differences between the generations can result in misinterpretation and stress among employees resulting in limited or poor communications that can in turn affect the bottom line. When the organization has to turn its attention to handling employee problems, including the time intensive labor of dealing with these employee issues, focus on the core mission is lost.

When the generational differences result in negative outcomes that are allowed to continue in a downward spiral, the result can affect employee retention. According to Oi Partners Inc., “Generational Differences Can Make for a Confusing Workplace,” generational differences in the workplace are prevalent and “over 70% of workers interviewed in a recent ExecuNet survey” said they are ready to change jobs and the overwhelming reason is related to the stress of generational differences in the workplace (2006, ¶ 5). So, in addition to employee stress, opinions toward and between generations, time spent managing personnel issues that impact overall company productivity and employee retention issues as a result of these differences it is no small wonder that negative impacts on teamwork is a problem that is prevalent in public and private organizations alike.

Other emergency services organizations are experiencing comparable “growing pains” in terms of assimilation of personnel from this newest generation. For example, the fire service and law enforcement services are both steeped in tradition and these traditions have been handed down throughout the generations until now. The members of Generations X and Y aren’t as interested in the traditions especially when people are following a tradition just for the sake of following (Henchey, 2005, Law Enforcement Tradition section, ¶ 1). Both generations place a higher premium on time with family and friends and working in a career that is meaningful to them but when the shift is over they readily leave the job behind to do what they enjoy. The job itself provides the excitement, the challenge and the meaning, the traditions not so much. The differences in values and priorities can create barriers between the newest generation and senior personnel when the generations fail to compromise or at least attempt to understand the things that are important to the other.

In an article titled “Different Than Boomers – Understanding How to Manage Generations X and Y” from (2007, ¶ 3) the author, Beth Orenstein, discusses key points from an interview with Richard Lewis, CRA, Phoenix Imaging Consultants that includes the differences between the generations in the field of emergency medicine and offers suggestions on how to manage this cohort. She says that management principles that worked with Traditionalist and Boomer generations will not work with Generations X and Y because they do not buy into the bureaucracy with authority figures and chains of command and believe it to be a waste of time. The author also stresses that for success in managing personnel in these generations the policies and expectations for working within the system should be made clear to them in the beginning because this will preempt many long-term personnel problems. If policies are not clearly and sufficiently detailed, these generations will assume their behavior is acceptable.

In an article from Police Chief Magazine entitled “Ready or Not, Here They Come: The Millennial Generation Enters the Workforce, the author James Henchey, discusses the workforce and leadership crises in law enforcement. However, some of his discussion points are applicable throughout the field public safety. Henchey cites a research study that was completed and published in 2004 where the authors state that,

The exciting news is that generation Y [millennials] behaviors and career choices are driven first and foremost by their quest for opportunities to play important roles in meaningful work that helps others. This is perhaps the most socially conscious generation since the 1960’s and they are exhibiting strong signs of altruism already (2005, Potential Futures section, ¶ 3).”

On the following page of the article the author discusses “threats to recruitment and retention of millennials” and perhaps the biggest threat, in a nutshell, is the disapproving attitude displayed toward this generation (2004, Threats to Recruitment and Retention of Millennials section, ¶ 3). Generation Y came up during a time when they were told they could succeed at anything they wanted to do and they are taking this foundation into the workforce with them. But, if the older generations continue to treat them critically and label them as loafers then the positive attitude they bring to the work place will be squashed. These are the attitudes and generational clashes that can hinder the development of teamwork and team building.

Based on the assumptions presented in the literature review thus far the author believes the impacts on teamwork and team building as a result of the addition of the newest fire service generation has not been entirely positive. The older, experienced personnel in Chapel Hill Fire Department exhibit some of the same attitudes and express the same stereotypes towards generations X and Y as do those in the articles that have been cited. We believe that because these personnel aren’t interested in working overtime they are not loyal to the organization. When the members of the newest fire service generation keep to themselves during downtime or activities that would normally be completed as team or crew activities, we think they are shunning us and just don’t want to be part of the group. Perhaps the problem is one we have failed to recognize. In Team Players and Teamwork the author notes that teamwork is simply not a naturally occurring phenomenon, rather it is an element that requires effort and dedication and in order to achieve success all must be open to and participate in the team building process (Parker, 1990, p. 148). Parker also states that every team member must understand the expectations, the goals and how each person on the team is supposed to contribute (1990, pp.

108-110). Ultimately if personnel fail to perform effectively the entire team is negatively impacted and eventually the success of the organization. This suggests that we need to start at square one with the newest fire service generation and begin teaching team skills rather than anticipating it to be a seamless process.

One problem that affects the image of generations X and Y is the constant barrage of negative print and television portrayals of what these generations think to be important (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002, p. 17). If we are to believe everything we read in the print media and view on television then it appears that generations X and Y don't think anything is important and that attitude is clearly incorrect. If you recall the character "Carrot Top" from the Dell Computer television advertisements think about the generational image he portrayed and how it impacted overall perceptions. The image and perceptions are not very positive and probably influence the way a lot of Traditionalists and Boomers identify Generations X and Y. These are the kind of negative stereotypes that affect perceptions which lead to pre-disposed attitudes.

In addition, everyone in the fire service has likely experienced attitudes from the newest generation such as those described in an article by Harry Carter titled, "20-Minute Wonders: Bane of the Fire Service" the author laments the fact that the younger generations just entering the fire service seem to have the attitude that once they've completed basic fire fighter certification training, they know everything there is to know about fire fighting (2007, p. 144). He goes on to state these personnel act as though they are the center of the universe and when the older personnel try to share experiences they are viewed as just another old fogey whose time has

come and gone. Some of these very issues are the ones we've seen exhibited by a number of the newest fire service personnel in our department.

All of the generational differences discussed in this section have an impact on teamwork in our department. We are at a crossroads in the development of the organization and can choose to guide the changes as a result of the addition of the newest generation or have the change forced upon us. Either way, things are going to change so it is imperative the fire department administration understands the problems so we can direct the change toward a positive outcome.

The consequences of negative impacts on teamwork for Chapel Hill Fire Department must be inferred based on the experiences of other fire departments and perhaps the "negative impacts" terminology was a poor choice of wording to select. However, the addition of newer personnel can result in problems for a variety of reasons. John Hinton discusses one quandary in relation to the assimilation of new personnel in the article "Old Timer's Guide to Guidance" (2005, p. 54). Part of the issue is that we have many new personnel coming into the service while we are also losing those with the skills and knowledge gained through years of training and job experiences. When this occurs we do not have the luxury of allowing new personnel a lengthy period of time to learn things gradually. The pace of the learning process has to be greatly increased because we need them to perform like seasoned veterans now. It isn't fair to expect new personnel, with a year or less on the job, to demonstrate the skills and knowledge of a seasoned veteran and this can create stress and dissension among team members.

In the article “Teaching Why” the author is having a discussion with a fire service colleague and the colleague relates that in his experiences and observations synchronized fire ground operations happen when the team has fought multiple fires within a period of a single shift (Mason, 2007, p. 124). When multiple incidents occur within a single duty period operations flow more smoothly because personnel have been there and done that at least a couple of times during the shift. It means that personnel have more realistic expectations (both from themselves and their team members) and they have a better understanding of the critical timing of specific tasks. The experiences related in this article bear out that teamwork problems can be avoided when there are multiple opportunities within a short period of time for team members to work together while literally in the line of fire. This means that training must be more realistic, more hands on and more frequent so that newer personnel gain the skills and knowledge needed to improve team performance.

In terms of consequences of impacts, negative or positive, on teamwork, Dave Dodson in “The Art Of First-Due” discusses the crucial role of the first-in engine company and even goes on to state that typically if the first-in crew makes the right calls and takes appropriate action the rest of the operation usually follows suit (2005, p. 135). If the crew does not make the right calls or take appropriate action the rest of the operation usually follows suit as well. The actions of the first in crew are critical because it impacts the entire operation for better or worse. If personnel are not operating effectively as a team, tasks go unfinished and the timing of specific tactical events misses their mark. Ultimately these actions or inactions could result in financial impacts due to greater property loss in the community, or life loss.

In order for our department to enjoy continued success in terms of the primary mission we must be willing to also continue to adapt and maintain flexibility. If we refuse to adapt we will become stagnant and this is where the newest members of the fire service generation can be of great benefit. Whether the selected reference for organizational change is evolution, development or flexibility; when new personnel join the department they bring youthful energy, vitality and renewal that all organizations need from time to time. In order for more experienced personnel to understand how to harness the energy and individual talents of the employees in the newest fire service generation they must also continue to learn new techniques and adapt. In an article titled "Adapt Leadership Styles To Achieve Objectives," Steven Mills notes there are a variety of leadership styles to suit a multitude of purposes and needs (2007, p. 129). In order to maintain team integrity the onus will be on all officers to learn and practice the different leadership styles so that we communicate constructively and recognize which style or styles are most effective with the newest personnel. In the author's discussion of leadership styles he notes the affiliative style with its emphasis on "personnel happiness, a smooth fit and interaction among members is generally considered positive and especially useful when attempting to build esprit de corps among team members" (Mills, 2007, p. 132). An affiliative leadership style also makes newer personnel feel like they belong because it allows the opportunity for their input and opinions.

Training is also key to building teamwork and maintaining team skills but in an article by Jim Mason (2007, p. 124) called "Teaching Why" we are challenged to remember that new recruits just out of the academy have gained at least basic knowledge of how things are done but rarely does anyone take time to explain why tasks are completed in a specific way. If we think back to when we were the new recruits, we learned, over time, why things were done in a certain way,

and procedures began to make more sense. Teaching why also allows us to question and explore the supposedly “tried and true” methods, which force the more experienced personnel to reexamine tasks and perhaps find more efficient and effective techniques for task completion.

An officer who willingly shares information garners trust and good will but one who is tight lipped and makes comments such as “do as you’re told and keep your mouth shut” will not earn the respect of newer personnel. The culture described in the latter part of the previous sentence used to be prevalent in the fire service; however in most organizations it has been replaced by a more open culture that encourages dialogue and the sharing of ideas. An open culture to encourage discussion will help all team members develop a sense of belonging and help prevent some of the problems that result from generational differences.

An article by Harry Carter (2007, p. 99) titled “Great Fire Service Leaders Must Kindle the Spark,” takes the notion even further. In the article Mr. Carter discusses how we (the experienced personnel) must apply ourselves to understand the things the newest generation holds important if we want them to be motivated to do the things they are being asked to do. Sure, these newest personnel applied for the job of their own free will but if the things we’re doing continue to be “because we’ve always done it that way,” then we’ll lose the best of what these young people have to offer. When these personnel ask, as they inevitably will, “what’s in it for me”, we’re going to have to be able to provide answers that are based on their wants, needs and personal and professional goals.

If our organization can accept that we must create these changes, from the top leadership down through the ranks then we should be successful in harnessing individual personnel talents while maintaining team integrity.

Procedures

During the two-week period at the National Fire Academy for attendance of the Executive Development course in April/May 2007, spare time was utilized to conduct research at the Learning Resource Center. The catalog system was used to identify resources available from the LRC including articles from periodicals, books and previously completed applied research projects. Research was also conducted at the computer lab via the World Wide Web. Google was the search engine used and search terminology included teamwork, generational differences in the workforce and generational impacts on teamwork in relation to the fire service. After returning to North Carolina further research was conducted by reviewing my personal collection of Fire Engineering, Firehouse and Fire Chief Magazines as well as periodicals subscribed to by Chapel Hill Fire Department. In addition to the previously listed magazines the department also subscribes to Fire Rescue magazine from which references for the literature review were taken. In addition to review of articles in periodicals, additional computer searches were completed via the World Wide Web, again using Google as the search engine with similar search terminology as previously described. These searches were conducted using the computer in my assigned office at Chapel Hill Fire Department as well as my personal computer from home. The main branch of the Durham County Library was also utilized to obtain textbooks for additional reference material.

For data collection an independent survey related to generational differences and the impacts on teamwork was distributed via computer to multiple organizations. Prior to distributing the surveys a main point of contact was identified at each organization to solicit participation and discuss the intent of the survey. The organizations receiving the survey were Chapel Hill Fire Department, Chapel Hill Police Department, and Orange County Sheriff's Department, Orange County Social Services Department, SunTrust Bank of Chapel Hill, Triangle Office Equipment, Carrboro Fire Department, Carrboro Police Department, Progress Energy and Duke Energy. These organizations were selected in order to include a representative sampling of public and private organizations and because most of these organizations must rely on teamwork and team skills particularly in times of crisis. The surveys were distributed on September 21st with a requested return deadline of October 10, 2007.

The purpose of the survey was to gain insight and perspective on the impacts of generational differences in both public and private organizations and determine how these differences impacted teamwork. Survey questions were developed based on personal observation and discussions with department personnel, specifically command staff and engine company officers to help identify the problems to be addressed. A group of ten personnel were initially selected to receive the survey and participate as a test group to detect technical problems with the survey as well as specific problems with questions or terminology. Once the survey revisions were completed it was distributed to the organizations listed above. Within the survey personnel were requested to identify age and to which generation they belonged in order to arrange the data to provide meaningful insight in relation to the original research questions posed.

Of the surveys sent to the organizations and agencies previously listed a total of 64 responses were received. The response rate for Chapel Hill Fire Department was 24 surveys returned out of 96 personnel (25 %); Chapel Hill Police Department returned 14 surveys out of 115 sworn personnel (12 %); Carrboro Police Department returned 3 surveys of 39 sworn personnel (7 %) and Carrboro Fire Department returned 23 completed surveys of 33 personnel (69 %). The other organizations listed as survey recipients chose not to participate.

In addition to surveys, personal observations were also conducted to obtain first hand knowledge of crew interaction during scheduled fitness activities and emergency response involving Chapel Hill Fire Department personnel. These observation periods took place between August 15th and August 30th 2007 and the time periods were selected randomly.

Personal interviews were also conducted to collect additional data. The personnel interviewed include Chapel Hill Fire Department engine company officers and shift commanders. Engine company officers and shift commanders were selected as subjects for interviews because they are the personnel with the greatest amount of direct contact with the newest generation of fire service employees in the department. The interviews were conducted on the premises of Chapel Hill Fire Department stations and occurred during times that were convenient for the interviewee. The purpose of the interviews was to collect supplementary information regarding teamwork issues in the department as it relates to the addition of the newest generation of fire personnel.

Results

While there was a wide variety of responses contained in the survey and there may not be sufficient data to support the theory that the addition of the newest fire service members is resulting in negative impacts on teamwork, some interesting overall results emerged.

In response to the question, how does the addition of the newest generation to the workforce impact teamwork in public and private organizations, survey analysis indicates that generally there are no significant impacts on teamwork due to the addition of these newest personnel. To support this statement consider that in response to the question, “how critical is teamwork in your occupation,” 88% of respondents listed teamwork as extremely critical and 31% rated the ability of team members to function as a team as excellent while 47% rated team function as very good. (Note: statistical information provided applies only to public safety agencies that submitted responses; none of the private organizations that were contacted and requested opted to participate in the survey. Also the results returned from law enforcement agencies were limited resulting in a very low level of confidence so they are not individually discussed.) While survey analysis indicates that overall, teamwork and team skills development is not a significant problem, additional evaluation related to subsequent research questions indicates there are some who believe otherwise.

In relation to the question how does the addition of the newest fire service generation to the workforce impact teamwork in other emergency services organizations, responses mirrored those

received from the fire service respondents in Chapel Hill Fire Department. 21 personnel (91%) with Carrboro Fire Department believe that teamwork is extremely critical and 16 personnel (69%) listed team function as excellent. (See full survey results in Appendix.)

Personal observations were conducted to gather information to evaluate the following question: How does the addition of the newest fire service generation to the workforce impact teamwork at Chapel Hill Fire Department? Generally, there was no evidence that members of the newest generation routinely failed to participate in group fitness activities. While participation was at times, inconsistent among personnel there was no clear delineation between the newest generation and the older generations. However, during observational periods under working structure fire conditions team integrity was in some cases inconsistent because newer personnel either lack endurance or have not learned how to pace themselves. This factor may be related to conditions that occur during academy training. In most cases, when our recruits are subjected to live fire training they complete a knockdown in the fire room then rotate out to allow another crew to participate. They do not get the opportunity during the recruit academy to conduct fire attack and extinguishment in conjunction with search and ventilation to be immediately followed by salvage and overhaul as it is in the real world.

During the observation periods there was an opportunity to study a shift that endured two difficult fires within two duty periods. The first involved a fire at an apartment complex and while team integrity was difficult to track for the duration of the incident there were no specific problems observed other than newer personnel were waiting to be told exactly what equipment they needed and what specific actions they needed to undertake. By the next duty day when the

second fire occurred the officers did not need to be as specific in their directions. This indicates the personnel learned and retained information from the recent fire and had a better understanding of the expectations.

The results of interviews conducted indicate there are some negative consequences in regards to impacts on teamwork for Chapel Hill Fire Department due to the addition of the newest generation of fire service personnel. The personnel interviewed largely believe our department is currently experiencing problems related to teamwork but the opinions and observations they shared are many and varied. One interviewee believes the newest generation is more interested in what they can prove as individuals rather than what they do as a team. Still another officer thinks the department was already fragmented and the introduction of more personnel will only exacerbate the problem. Several officers made statements in relation to the work ethic of the newest generation. Most think the work ethic is different in that the newest people will do what they are told but only what they are told.

Patience and a willingness to explain why we do things the way we do seems to be the overwhelming response to the question of how the department might harness the energy and individual talents that employees in the newest fire service generation bring to the department while we maintain the integrity of the team concept. Most officers interviewed stated the introduction of the newest personnel has made all officers be more accountable and requires that they take more time to explain concepts and share information in order to develop the skills needed in the newer folks.

Results of Interviews with Chapel Hill Fire Department Personnel

Question 1: Do you think Chapel Hill Fire Department is currently experiencing teamwork issues?

Six interviewees responded “yes,” one “no” and one “I suppose” to the question.

Question 2: Why and can you point to one specific thing that seems to be causing the teamwork problems or is it a combination of things?

Most interviewees believe there is no one single cause for the teamwork problems individual responses are as follows:

Captain D. Jordan doesn't think there is enough department-wide interaction among personnel; we were already fragmented and the addition of newer personnel will only result in more fragmentation (interview, October 9, 2007).

Capt. R. Watson states the inconsistencies in staffing are an issue because when shortages occur in another station key people are moved to fill vacancies and the result is every three days his crew changes. 33% of the department is made up of personnel with one year of experience or less. Once these personnel are able to fill in as relief driver or acting officer things should improve (interview, October 9, 2007).

Battalion Chief J. Cabe believes the impacts of generations X and Y are that these personnel want to prove how much they know individually, not how much they know in terms of working

together. He also states the newer generations are not the “lead by example” kind of people and our officers are going to have to develop new ideas and techniques to teach these newest personnel the importance of teamwork (interview, October 11, 2007).

Capt. N. Clark doesn’t think the teamwork problems are due entirely to the addition of the new personnel but he does think the newest generation has a different work ethic. He said they’ll do what they’re told to do but you have to tell them. Things just don’t automatically get done like they used to (interview, October 10, 2007).

Battalion Chief V. Harris thinks the problem is the newest generation is an instant gratification society; they want to be heroes now, they want to be in power, get promoted and have their opinions count, now. They also don’t want to work as hard on the “grunt” work (interview, October 10, 2007).

Capt. P. Moss was the lone “no” response in relation to question #1 and he thinks that individual crews work well together. However, he also believes the three operational shifts are further apart and the department as a whole is not on the same page (interview, October 12, 2007).

Capt. R. Pruitt also believes that individual crews function well together but we’re not whole in terms of shifts or the department. He says that some individuals who do well are sort of exalted while others who are not doing as well are singled out and this turns them into loners, which does not promote teamwork (interview, October 11, 2007).

Battalion Chief B. McLamb does not think there are any major problems related to teamwork (interview, October 17, 2007).

Question 3: Considering the influx of the newest generation of fire service personnel in the 20-25 year age bracket are generational differences causing impacts on teamwork and if so, what are the impacts good and bad?

Capt. D. Jordan stated that different age groups bring different challenges but overall create positive impacts on teamwork. When new people are injected we place a high priority on company level training and that helps to improve teamwork (interview, October 9, 2007).

Capt. R. Watson doesn't think the age group is the issue with teamwork as much as the lack of experience. We can't rely on them as much as when we were hiring people with experience. The good thing is that with the additional staffing on apparatus there is plenty of help to carry equipment. On structure fires they haven't shown him much because the new folks are usually laying out in the yard counting stars (interview, October 9, 2007).

B/C J. Cabe believes the impact is that crews are now split between the newer personnel and the older personnel (interview, October 11, 2007).

Capt. N. Clark thinks the positive benefit of the newer personnel is that it makes officers more accountable and makes them lead more. The negative impact is that officers also have to condition the new folks to act on their own initiative. He also says that these new people are not used to a team environment or that what they do affects others (interview, October 10, 2007).

B/C V. Harris thinks the new personnel are smart but don't have the same work ethic and this negatively impacts teamwork (interview, October 10, 2007).

Capt. P. Moss said the overall impacts are positive because the new personnel are asking why things are done in a certain way because they truly want to know and understand. It makes experienced personnel more fully explain their actions (interview, October 12, 2007).

Capt. R. Pruitt thinks the addition of the new personnel is positive overall. He said the new folks are fresh, excited and eager to learn. The negative part is that we're accustomed to bringing on experienced personnel from other departments so we're not as patient as we need to be with these new people who have no experience other than what they learned in the academy. When they make a mistake we're ready to chop off their heads. Officers need to learn to be more patient (interview, October 11, 2007).

B/C B. McLamb thinks the impact of the new personnel is positive because it makes the supervisors be teachers, trainers, mentors, and coaches and work more to develop the new folks.

However, he also thinks the work ethic of the new personnel is not the same as the work ethic of some of the older, more experienced personnel (interview, October 17, 2007).

A more comprehensive analysis of the survey data indicates that 42 (65%) respondents were Generation X, six (.09 %) were Generation Y and 16 (25%) were Boomers. Most respondents indicated they participate in fitness activities as a crew (78%) and utilize break or spare time (98%) to interact with their team members. Even though personnel make use of break time to interact with team members 33 respondents (51%) state they think co-workers believe differences exist due to generational influences. However, overall respondents (42 or 65%) do not think generational differences create problems or conflicts in relation to team performance nor do they think (51 or 79%) generational differences impacts teamwork during training sessions. Additionally there were 42 (65%) respondents who indicated that generational differences do not impact teamwork during emergency incident mitigation.

Based on the responses it would not appear that generational differences are creating any long-lasting or severe impacts on teamwork, which is contrary to personal observations and the statements and observations shared by co-workers when the research topic was originally chosen. However, from the time this topic was initially selected until final project completion it seems our department has undergone a period of rapid development. When the first academy of new recruits joined the ranks on shift duty it seemed that engine company officers were uncertain regarding methods they should use to assimilate the newest personnel into their crews. As one interviewee stated, prior to the 2006 academy we were accustomed to hiring experienced personnel so all facets of the task of crew assimilation was easier. Now that we have completed

two recruit academies and Generation Y personnel account for 33% of the department the task of crew assimilation is more challenging. It is possible that with the passage of time our front line officers have become more accustomed to these challenges with the second group of academy personnel so it may be that what was initially understood as generational differences was more likely a serious case of growing pains.

Discussion

While the issue of work ethic draws support from discussion in literature review in the Intergenerational Workforce White Paper (Perkins, et.al., 2007, p. 4) and from personal interviews, it is likely still too early to cast a final determination on the work ethic of the newest fire service members. Work ethic, like team building can be a learned process and one that if accomplished correctly will create long term positive impacts for the organization.

One of the issues we deal with in our department is that many of the personnel who have recently graduated from the two fire academies are very young, (18-25 years of age) in some cases still live with their parents and have never been taught or required to complete basic cleaning tasks. Our personnel are required to conduct station maintenance duties on a daily basis and many of the newest personnel had to be taught simple tasks like how to properly clean a toilet. With this thought in mind the question then becomes is it truly an issue of work ethic or do these younger personnel simply not understand how to complete the tasks asked of them? The answer is yet to be determined.

Another thought introduced in the White Paper (Perkins, et.al., 2007, p. 1) is that older workers, with the motivation and focus on profits rather than employee loyalty, may be considered obsolete and unwanted. Personnel interviews support this statement because some point to the fact that new personnel only share experiences with other new personnel and still others think that crews are split based on years of experience and age.

The views stated by one Chapel Hill Fire officer, that new personnel constantly seek to know why tasks are accomplished in a certain way relates to the fact that managing the personnel in the newest generation means employers must make expectations clear in the beginning in order to be successful with this cohort (Orenstein, 2007, ¶ 3). Teaching why (Mason, 2007, p. 124) is also relevant with the newest fire service generation to make certain they fully understand the reasons regarding why we do certain things the way we do them.

In order to gain success with harnessing individual talents we must dispense with the labels and stereotypes that can hinder team building and learn to adopt patience with these new personnel. Teamwork must also be taught but we cannot rely on “lead by example” for teaching team skills any longer. Every individual who is part of the team must be open to participating in the team building process. Parker states that it is important that expectations and team goals are clearly defined so that all personnel understand what is expected (1990, p. 108).

As discussed in an article (Mason, 2007, p. 124), the author notes that teamwork issues become increasingly remote when crews are subjected to trial by fire on multiple occasions within a short period of time. This observation was prevalent in my own department when the same shift of personnel experienced two difficult structure fires within two duty periods. While there were only a few noticeable problems on the first fire, tasks seemed to flow more smoothly at the second and there was a much better understanding of expectations.

Since the newest generation of fire service personnel seems to expect instant gratification, as noted by one Chapel Hill Fire officer, then the affiliative style of leadership (Mills, 2007, p. 132) with its emphasis on “personal happiness and interaction among team members” is likely the most useful of the leadership styles in relation to the newest fire service generation. This style will provide the newest members the chance to be heard and make them feel like they belong.

The results of the survey generally do not indicate there are teamwork related problems at Chapel Hill Fire Department. As discussed in the results section it may be a situation where the initial diagnosis was at least partially incorrect and now we are on the downward side of the issues that may have resulted from growing pains that were due to an influx of new personnel. Survey results notwithstanding, the lessons learned as a result of the problems we have experienced means we must recognize there were organizational implications that resulted from this influx and use these lessons for application to future issues. When the organization makes a strategic change in terms of hiring and assimilating large groups of new personnel then we need to do a better job of preparing line officers for the challenges related to these changes.

Recommendations

Based on the results there are several recommendations for improving overall team and organizational effectiveness. These recommendations center on training and realistic objectives so that all personnel, not just the newest members, clearly understand expectations.

In the past when our department hired experienced personnel these new personnel were assigned, at least initially, to a shift-training officer to begin the orientation and training process. Once the new hire checklist was completed the individual was handed off to their more or less permanent station and officer assignment. That system worked well enough for experienced personnel but more is needed for the newest generation of personnel who come on shift with no experience. When new personnel who are lacking on the job experience join the department then officer training and development must be improved so that officers are given the tools to better anticipate and handle problems related to the challenges of an influx of the newest fire service generation.

In terms of concrete recommendations our department should develop specific goals and expectations for each officer level as they relate to training for new personnel. We should also implement regular developmental training that includes topics on gender and diversity issues, including generational diversity that specifically targets the issues faced by the fire service. Meaning, there are few occupations where personnel of different genders, cultures, races and

generations are forced to live, eat, sleep and work together for long periods of time and these issues, if not addressed, can result in misunderstandings and conflict.

Implementation of goals and expectations for each officer level should be accomplished by developing a focus group of key members from each level of rank. The purpose of a focus group would be to develop specific goals and expectations and by including all levels of rank the buy-in from all department members should be greatly enhanced. Inclusion of all rank structures also allows the opportunity for broader viewpoints and discussion.

Implementation of the different topics of diversity training should be accomplished by bringing in others from the fire service field to share their experiences and observations related to these topics. Many times the fire service makes the mistake of bringing an outside “expert” to discuss these issues but the expert has little to no experience in relating the problems to the fire service. People outside the fire service, based on the author’s experience, have difficulty truly understanding the multitude of challenges we face. It is important that our personnel can relate to those who are speaking about our unique challenges just as the person speaking to us must have the ability to relate to us and be able to draw from similar experiences. Like it or not, this job can make people cynical so the design of any developmental initiatives must be realistic if we want our personnel to consider new perspectives.

Rather than or perhaps in addition to follow-up evaluation it is critical to maintain the focus group design to stay current regarding the challenges and problems that our personnel are facing.

The core group should change on a regular basis, perhaps annually, to allow for the introduction of new ideas but the focus group should not be a one time event to handle a specific problem or crisis. It provides a means for department administration to be proactive rather than reactive in relation to handling issues before they become large problems.

Recommendations for others who may be interested in researching similar issues include but are not limited to the following: when choosing organizations for surveys consider private organizations that utilize teamwork in order to gain different perspectives on the issues. It is also recommended that future researchers contact smaller private organizations rather than mega-corporations because the likelihood of survey participation may increase.

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Appendix A: Executive Development Survey

1. Choose your age from the dropdown list (click on Age Range then the arrow next to it to see the ranges).	Age Range	18-25
2. Do you fully participate in all team/crew activities?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, is your participation due to personal choice or is it because you were ordered to participate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Orders
3. Generally, throughout the entire organization, do personnel participate in all team/crew activities due to personal choice or because they are ordered to do so?	<input type="checkbox"/> Choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Orders
4. Do you spend time interacting with co-workers during break times or at other times when there are no specific work related tasks to be completed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. If you do not choose to spend most break times interacting with co-workers what is the reason for your choice and what do you typically do during your break times?		
Answer:		
6. Do you think your generation is labeled with negative stereotypes? If yes, what are some of the typical derogatory terms you've heard co-workers use to describe members of your generation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
7. Throughout the organization, have you overheard others use derogatory terms to label members of your generation? If yes, please list the terms.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
8. How critical is teamwork in your occupation? Choose from the dropdown menu.	Range	Extremely Critical
9. If you believe teamwork is critical in your occupation, why?		
Answer:		
10. If you believe teamwork is not critical in your occupation, why not?		
Answer:		
11. What do you do to contribute to team building skills and good team performance?		
Answer:		
12. Do co-workers believe that differences exist due to generational influences? If yes, does anyone initiate discussion to try and improve understanding and teamwork among the generations?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
13. Understanding that team skills are a learned behavior rather than an inherent, naturally occurring personal trait; have you ever received any training relative to teamwork or team building skills? If yes, please briefly describe the main topics including length of training.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		

14. Does your organization provide team skills training on a regular basis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
15. Has your organization offered any training to assist in developing team-building skills among members of different generations? If yes, please briefly describe the main topics including length of training.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
16. How would you rate the level of teamwork among your team/crew members? Choose from the dropdown menu.	Response	Excellent
17. Do you think generational differences create problems or conflicts in relation to team function and performance? If yes, please briefly describe the problems and how they impact team performance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
18. Thinking about your organization as a whole, what problems or conflicts in team performance have you observed that are a result of generational differences?		
Answer:		
19. To which generation do you belong? Choose from the dropdown menu.	Generation	
20. How often does your team participate in training activities, whether classroom or practice drills?	Schedule	
21. Do generational differences impact teamwork during training sessions? If yes, please briefly describe.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
22. During actual work related events/incidents where the ability to function as a team may be paramount; do generational differences impact team performance? If yes, please describe how team performance is affected.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
23. Generally, how would you rate the ability of your team members to function as a team?		
24. In relation to your team members; list the number of personnel in each age group. 18-25 ____ 26-30 ____ 31-35 ____ 36-40 ____ 41-45 ____ 46-50 ____ 50+ ____		
25. Does your organization provide any type of mentoring program for new personnel? If yes, please briefly describe the program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
26. Does your organization provide any diversity training? If yes, please briefly describe.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Answer:		
27. What is your occupation and how long have you worked in this occupation?		
Answer:		

Appendix B: Executive Survey Results Tabulated

1.	18-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	50+	No age listed
	7	14	12	11	6	7	3	4
2.	Yes	No						
	50	14						
2b.	Choice	Orders	Answered No to question 2					
	49	1	14					
3.	Choice	Orders						
	42	22						
4.	Yes	No						
	63	1						
5.	Narrative Response							
6.	Yes	No						
	17	47						
6b.	Narrative Response							
7.	Yes	No	No Response					
	8	55	1					
7b.	Narrative Response							
8.	Extremely	Critical	No Response					
	56	7						
9.	Narrative Response							
10.	No Responses							
11.	Narrative Response							
12.	Yes	No	No Response	I don't know				
	33	28	2					
12b.	Narrative Response							
13.	Yes	No	No Response					
	38	25	1					
14.	Yes	No	No Response					
	27	36	1					
15.	Yes	No	No Response					
	16	46	2					
15b.	Narrative Response							

16.	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	No Response		
	19	29	7	4	2	3		
17.	Yes	No	No Response					
	21	42	1					
17b.	Narrative Response							
18.	Narrative Response							
19.	Gen X	Gen Y	Boomer					
	42	6	16					
20.	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Semi	Annually	N/A or No Response	
	13	16	13	9	3	1	9	
21.	Yes	No	No Response					
	11	51	2					
21b.	Narrative Response							
22.	Yes	No	No Response					
	9	42	13					
22b.	Narrative Response							
23.	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	No Response			
	20	30	10	3	1			
24.	Ages work with							
25.	Yes	No	No Response					
	36	27	1					
25b.	Narrative Response							
26.	Yes	No	No Response					
	48	14	2					
26b.	Narrative Response							
27.	Fire Dept.	Police Dept	No Response					
	46	17	1					

Appendix C: Observations

Fitness Observations

Date	Begin Time	End Time	Purpose of observation	Location	Observations
8/15	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 3	5 personnel of the 8 assigned to the station participated as a group. Two of the personnel who did not participate were not members of the newest FS generation; one was
8/16	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 1	All personnel participated in fitness training as a group
8/21	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 4	Two of the four personnel participated in fitness training; two (officer and driver) did not
8/22	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 5	All personnel participated in fitness activities but two personnel walked while two personnel lifted weights
8/23	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 2	The officer and crew played around at lifting weights; no real direction during the designated fitness time.
8/27	0730	0830	Crew participation in fitness training	Station 5	All personnel participated in fitness in activities as a crew

Emergency Response Observations

Date	Begin Time	End Time	Purpose of observation	Location	Observations
8/6	5:29 pm	6:17	Crew activities during emergency response	300 Mason Farm Rd. Vehicle Fire	Initially responding crew implemented correct tactics with all members participating. Second arriving crew also performed correctly in support role. When fire was out, personnel split up by age group rather than by crew assignment for further discussion of incident and actions taken. Newest members specifically were the ones who separated from their crews to discuss the incident.
8/8	4:01 pm	4:39		N. Fordham Blvd. @ Ephesus Vehicle Fire	I arrived on scene just ahead of first due engine company. All personnel dismounted apparatus with tools or went immediately to retrieve tools from compartment and deploy hoseline. No hesitation on the part of any personnel to take correct action and prepare to go to work. Fire suppression activities went smoothly. No problems. All personnel worked.
8/13	1:42 pm	5:13		107 Channing Ln. RSF	Good team integrity initially. Roughly 35 minutes into the fire attack, multiple new personnel became exhausted and had to take a break in the front yard. One officer stated he felt like he was onstage at Walnut Creek (an outdoor amphitheater for musical performances) because there were so many people laid out in the grass. The perception is that new personnel have not yet learned how to pace themselves. Therefore, for incidents that require endurance, they are less likely to be able to maintain.
8/26	2:02 am	8:35 8/27/07		1105 NC 54 Hwy Kingswood Apt Bldg Fire	Difficult fire, multiple apartment units involved, required multiple agency response. Team integrity was difficult to track in some instances, but no specific problems observed, and no complaints from officers.
8/28	4:42 am	10:15 am		# 4 Davie Lane RSF	Another difficult fire due to terrain surrounding the residence. The residence was two-story on the front, and two to three stories on the rear. Severe slope to the rear of the house, and the area was heavily wooded. Team operations and function were very good—perhaps due to two fires in two shift days for these personnel. They seemed to have a better understanding of expectations, resulting in more cohesive team function and overall operations.
9/1	3:29 pm	6:00 pm		500 Umstead Bolinwood Apt Fire	Multi-company response. Fire began as a brush fire that spread to outside of building and progressed to structure fire. Initially, crew integrity was upheld. As incident progressed some new personnel had to go to rehab 30 minutes into incident due to exhaustion. Perception again is that rookies need to learn self-control so they can be ready to work the duration of the incident rather than being spent after one 30 minute bottle of air.